

South Bend Tribune Article

November 18, 2005

# Street party rocks football weekends

WEEKEND

**By JACK WALTON**  
**Tribune Correspondent**

As hundreds of football fans flooded downtown South Bend on the Friday night before the USC game, many locals and out-of-towners were drawn to the sounds of disco and dance music thumping from a tent in the Rockne Plaza, adjacent to the College Football Hall of Fame.

The unmistakable strains of "I Will Survive" and other dance favorites were not booming from a disc jockey's rig, though. It was Vinylized, a local band, playing live under the tent as the featured act for the weekend's Football Fridays festivities. Now in its second year, the tent party has been a smash with Notre Dame fans as well as visitors in town to support the team's opponents.

"For the USC weekend, we had around 600 people show up," says Robin Slutsky, Downtown South Bend Inc. marketing and development coordinator.

DTSB partnered with the College Football Hall of Fame and the South Bend/Mishawaka Convention and Visitors Bureau to sponsor the events in an effort to encourage football fans to explore and enjoy downtown, rather than just the University of Notre Dame area and Grape Road.

"Several years ago, 'Sports Illustrated' had an article describing a game here, saying wonderful things about Notre



**Downtown South Bend Inc. and the College Football Hall of Fame throw "Football Friday" parties together on the night before University of Notre Dame home games. Today is the last party of the season, in advance of the Notre Dame-University of Syracuse game.**

Tribune Photo SANTIAGO FLORES



**People gather in downtown South Bend in front of the College Football Hall of Fame to listen to Eargazm on Nov. 11 during that evening's Football Friday event.**

Dame and very negative things about downtown," Slutsky says. "We wanted to bring an energy and vibrancy to downtown, an urban street party."

The events offer food, drinks, T-shirt sales, giveaways and video games as well as live music. The games run the gamut from ancient to modern: "Blasteroids" reminds some of the golden age of '80s games, while the Hall of Fame brings out a DVD trivia unit, "Snap TV," which is at the forefront of gaming technology.

But of course, the biggest draw is the live music.

Last weekend, before the Navy game, the band was Eargasm, playing a mixture of original progressive rock and covers, an easy halfway point between the extended jams of the Grateful Dead and the smooth grooves of Beck. Previous weeks have featured Driftwood, Mack Pherson and the Struts and This End Up.

Free of the one-sided nature of a pep rally, the entertainment is nonpartisan fun that welcomes both squads' supporters.

"Tennessee brought a sea of orange. They wanted to dance, drink, eat and revel," Slutsky says. A security force is present but has not been necessary so far, with a spirit of camaraderie prevailing every time.

"We've also had some great luck with the weather," Slutsky says. "There have been some pretty wonderful sunsets."

Downtown pubs such as Fiddler's Hearth and the Madison Oyster Bar, and neighboring businesses such as the Chocolate Café, have also benefited from the added draw at the Hall of Fame.

"It does have a big impact. We get really busy," Chocolate Café assistant manager Dennis Wyatt says. "And although they serve alcohol (at the tent parties,) we haven't had any problems."

The Revolving Door, a classic rock act, appears tonight at the final tent party of the season.

"Next year, there are seven home games, including blockbusters like Penn State," Slutsky says. "We already have bands calling, asking if they can get in for 2006."



**The Revolving Door Band will perform today at the final "Football Friday" event of the season in front of the College Football Hall of Fame.**

Tribune Photos/SANTIAGO FLORES